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PANEL CONSIDERING A MOBILE MISSILE SMALLER THAN MX

IT WOULD HAVE 1 WARHEAD

Strategic Forces Commission Looking at Weapon Carried in an Armored Vehicle

By LESLIE H. GELB

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WASHINGTON, Feb. 7 — President Reagan's Commission on Strategic Forces is considering recommending development of a small intercontinental missile with a single warhead that could be deployed in specially armored carriers, according to sources close to the panel.

They said this would be in addition to recommending that the proposed MX missiles be placed in existing silos.

The sources said the small missile could be driven around military bases in the armored vehicles or carried to different bases by helicopter.

The armoring and design of the carriers, said to be a dramatic breakthrough in technology, combined with their mobility, would supposedly allow the missiles to survive a first strike by Soviet nuclear weapons.

Besides carrying a single nuclear warhead to the MX's 10, the new missile would be about half as tall as the 71-foot MX and weigh 22,000 pounds to the larger missile's 190,000 pounds.

Elusive Goal for Panel

The 11-member panel was chosen last month to examine not only a basing plan but also to review the entire program to modernize the United States' strategic arsenal. Its goal is to develop a package to correct what many military experts say are weaknesses in the strategic arsenal that would be acceptable to diverse interests in the Reagan Administration and Congress.

The panel, headed by a former national security adviser, Gen. Brent Scowcroft, is to make its recommendations to Mr. Reagan by Feb. 18. Mr. Reagan is expected to make new proposals to Congress after March 1. Several panel members and officials connected with the study of the mobile missile are said to be urging a delay in both reports so that they can further study technical aspects of the small missile idea and consult with key legislators.

Could Replace Other Missiles

Study commissions as recently as last year considered and then rejected the idea of a land-based small missile, saying the weapon would be too vulnerable. Proponents now say, however, that technological advances make a small missile feasible.

Advocates of the small missile contend further that since the missile would carry only one warhead and would presumably replace several existing missiles that have multiple warheads, the weapon should reduce Soviet concerns about an American first strike.

At the same time, however, commission members who may support the missile's development also feel the larger MX missile, with its 10 warheads that can be aimed at different targets, should be still be deployed. They argue the MX is needed to attain parity with Soviet land-based missile forces and to as a means of pressing Moscow for compromises in the strategic arms reductions talks.

The small intercontinental missile was called SICM in some previous Pentagon studies and "Midgetman" in others. The past studies said it would take nearly 3,500 SICMs to equal the destructive power of 200 MX missiles.

The Problem at Hand

Panel members and key Administration officials are known to be keenly aware that another failure to find a land-based intercontinental missile acceptable to Congress will jeopardize deployment of any new missile in the coming years.

Thus, according to the sources, most members of the panel are already leaning against the closely packed basing method, which Congress rejected last year anyway. The theory of that so-called dense pack basing was that bunching the missiles would cause attacking warheads to destroy each other. Most panel members are also said to have excluded resurrecting Carter Administration plans for shutting the missiles between shelters.

These plans faltered on grounds of politics, cost and feasibility.

The only recent idea that seems to have attained some support in the panel is for the MX to be carried by a spe-

cially built long flying aircraft. But the Air Force continues to be strongly opposed to this because it fear that it would mean the end of the MX.

A consensus is said to be building within the panel that, for a new package to gain a majority in Congress, it must be acceptable to the Air Force, to Democrats and Republicans concerned that any land-based missile is vulnerable and to those concerned about arms control.

While the Air Force is not expected to like the idea of bearing the cost of an entirely new missile, some panel members have indicated that the service will go along if it is assured of getting the MX, which it does not want to lose because it embodies the latest in missile technology.

Broad Backing Expected

Several panel members expect broad backing for the single-warhead missile. Among the plan's supporters to date have been Representative Albert Gore Jr., Democrat of Tennessee, and William Van Cleave, a conservative strategic thinker. The missile's appeal to arms control proponents lies in its promise of ultimately replacing missiles equipped with multiple warheads and thus sharply reducing the total number of warheads. They say the fewer the number of warheads, the greater the stability between the powers and the less likely the chances of an attack.

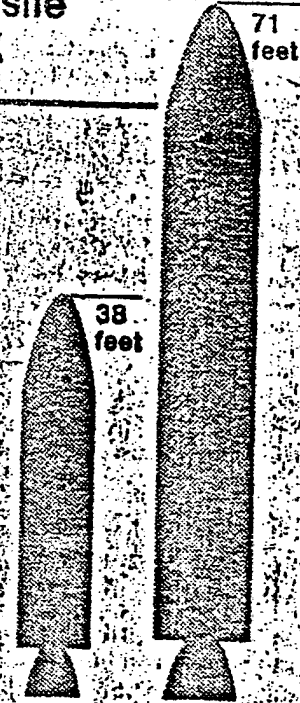
It is also potentially attractive to those worried about what President Reagan has called a "window of vulnerability," if it can be shown to be feasible.

Past expert committees rejected the idea of putting missiles on such ground

The Proposed New Missile Compared With the MX

	Proposed small missile	MX missile
Length	38 feet	71 feet
Diameter	71 inches	92 inches
Weight	22,000 pounds	192,000 pounds
Range	8,000 miles	8,000 miles
Warheads	1	10

Information on proposed small missile is approximate, based on past Defense Department studies.



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vehicles as trucks and trains because they felt the carriers could not be kept on military reservations and survive an attack. The missiles could not be dispatched on railways and highways for fear of accidents or attacks by terrorists.

The supposed breakthrough that would overcome these obstacles is the design of a vehicle that Pentagon officials call the "Armadillo." It would have a thick armored shell, a low silhouette, and the ability to anchor itself into the ground. In theory, this would prevent it from being overturned by the blast of a nuclear explosion.

Even so, technicians would also have to demonstrate that the vehicle and

missile could survive the heat and radiation of a nuclear attack. The key would be to make the vehicle difficult for Soviet satellites to track. If the military reservation on which the missiles roamed was large enough, according to this theory, the Russians would have to waste a prohibitively high number of warheads to try to destroy them.

Some technicians say additional safety for Armadillo could be provided by making it light enough to be transported by helicopters.

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